Faith and Inspiration

Dichotomy of Self

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In what manner is the renewal or regeneration of human beings possible? Our minds, bodies, and souls seem to be engaged in perpetual struggle with conflicts from without and within. We long for peace but remain embroiled in hostilities. We ache for serenity but are immersed in turmoil. We pine after harmony but foment strife. As flawed, fallen, sinful creatures, we struggle to reconcile our deepest desires for wholeness, camaraderie, and solidarity with our seemingly innate tendency towards discord, alienation, and schisms.

The overall theme of the Bible prescribes a pathway to redemption and restoration of humankind as a whole and individually through the atonement provided by Jesus. In many respects, our lives consist of antecedent and successive conditions surrounding spiritual rebirth and metamorphosis — that is, we all grapple with ramifications of choices made before and after our own transformation by the gospel message.

The Scripture is clear that prior to being born again, we are wholly subject to guilt and condemnation (John 3:18). The point at which we come to fully realize and comprehend this reality of our plight as mere transgressors is the point at which we, in desperation, can come to surrender ourselves entirely to God's mercy. From that point forward, as stated in 2 Corinthians 5:17, new creation occurs within us as we embark on a Spirit-led journey of discovery, awakening, and fulfillment. It is truly a transition from death to life, and Scripture contains abundant metaphorical, illustrative language to emphasize this conversion and revolution of persona: "crucified with Christ," "buried with Christ," "raised with Christ" (Galatians 2:20; Romans 6:3:3-4; Colossians 3:1).

The apostle Paul further expands on this delineation between the old and new states of being, this dichotomy of self, the parallel between death versus life and old versus new. In the continuation of the passage from Romans, Paul asserts that it was in fact our "old self" which was crucified with Jesus, so that "our body of sin might be done away with" (Romans 6:6).

Similarly, Paul's exhortation elsewhere is to "rid yourselves of the old self" representing corruption and deceit, and to "put on the new self" defined as "the likeness of God" (Ephesians 4:22-24). What makes the entire notion of old and new selves such an integral part of the good news of the gospel is that once we embrace the redeeming nature of our identification with Jesus in his death, burial, and resurrection, we come to recognize the incomprehensibly all-encompassing quality of God's grace and forgiveness.

The Bible affirms that upon our confession and commitment of faith in Jesus, God forgives the guilt of our sin, choosing to no longer remember our sin — that is, to not hold it against us, for his Son's sake (Psalm 32:5; Isaiah 43:25; Jeremiah 31:34; 2 Corinthians 5:19; Colossians 2:12-14).

In truth, it may not always be so easy to relinquish or renounce former things, to repudiate the impact of the past, even that which is intended to be considered "dead and buried." Divine forgiveness does not necessarily preclude facing consequences of past misdeeds or offenses.

In the television series "Star Trek: Deep Space 9," Jadzia Dax, science officer aboard the titular space station, is a member of a symbiotic species known as Trill. In Trill society, certain individuals may be chosen to bond or join with generally long-lived, sentient, worm-like creatures known as symbionts. The Trill and the symbiont enter a mutually beneficial relationship in which the Trill serves as a host for the symbiont so that it may continue to extend its life experience while sharing its accumulated memories and knowledge with the host. If or when the host passes away, efforts are made to transfer the symbiont to a new host. Jadzia has prepared almost all her young life for the privilege of serving as host for a symbiont called Dax.

In one episode, the actions and motivations of the previous host for Dax, a Trill man named Curzon, become the subject of a criminal investigation. Attempts are made by the accuser, Ilon Tandro, to extradite Jadzia — initially quite forcefully — in order to have her face prosecution for crimes of betrayal and murder allegedly committed 30 years ago by Curzon.

The Starfleet commander of the station, Benjamin Sisko, arranges for a hearing to determine the legality of such a warrant. Sisko contends that while Curzon and Jadzia may have both served as hosts for the Dax symbiont, due to the nature of the Trill joining they are unique and separate individuals, and Jadzia cannot be held accountable for the actions of a past host. Sisko consults with the station's chief medical officer, Julian Bashir, and the liaison officer, Kira Nerys, regarding Jadzia's situation.

SISKO: *I want you to find all the medical evidence you can to support the theory that Jadzia Dax and Curzon Dax are two entirely separate people. Major —*
BASHIR: *Excuse me, sir. I don't know that there is any medical evidence on that.*
SISKO: *Assume there is, then find it. Major, I'm not asking you to be an attorney here, but if you could check the Federation computers for any precedents, legal decisions involving Trills.*
KIRA: *Is a Trill responsible for the conduct, for the acts of its antecedent selves?*
SISKO: *Right. That kind of thing.*
KIRA: *What if I find the answer's yes?*
SISKO: *Then that answer is wrong.*

Later, as the hearing continues, another joined Trill named Selin Peers, a government representative, is brought in as an expert witness regarding the symbiotic experience. Tandro intends to prove by official testimony that Trill hosts retain all the memories and emotions of their symbiont.

TANDRO: *So if a crime is committed by a Trill, then the symbiont's next host would remain aware of it, would recall that crime?*
PEERS: *Yes, absolutely.*
TANDRO: *Would recall the details of it.*
PEERS: *Yes, absolutely.*
TANDRO: *And would still feel the guilt of it.*
PEERS: *Oh, yes.*

The ultimate question of Trill criminal liability seems at an impasse. As it happens, the entire proceedings are rendered moot when a key witness provides an alibi for Curzon during the presumed time of the commission of the crimes. The warrant against Jadzia — and Curzon — Dax is summarily dismissed.

For believers, part of the wonder and mystery of God's grace is that through Jesus's atoning sacrifice our old self is laid to rest, and with that death and rebirth into our new self, the sins of the past no longer define who we are. We are born again, made new, and God dismisses any indictment against our soul by virtue of Jesus's recompense on our behalf. While we may continue to contend with the repercussions of our dichotomy of self, by faith we must be willing to yield these to God as well, striving to live in the hope of new life.